

MEN OF MIGHT ARE THE WRESTLERS OF JAPAN



The Sport Held in High Favor and the Bouts of the Champions Great Public Festivals

By JOSEPH L. C. CLARKE.

ONE used to wonder years ago when bands of Japanese acrobats toured the world if their skill was exceptional and whether all the people of that distant, little known land were equally able to walk up poles and balance themselves with flowery umbrellas on perches placed high in the air. We know better now, but there is something in the thought. The Japanese is born to physical exercise if not to athletics. He is in the nature of things sturdy on his relatively strong legs and strong as a cat because shanks' mare over a country of hills and hollows has been almost his only carrier not only of himself but his belongings. Naturally, too, when speed was necessary he must make it himself. The pride of swift, strong carriage, the pride of burden bearing went together, and all the men and the peasant proportion of the women shared it. All were potential athletes.

That is true of the whole people, but of a special class, the Samurai or fighting men, the care of the body from the point of cultivating strength, suppleness and skill in exercise was its habit most rigidly enforced. The vigor and cheer with which women work in the fields rob the fact of their doing such work at all of what Americans would call inhumanity. The work must be done; they are there to do it, and why not fall to with a will?

Boasting one day along the shores of Lake Biwa, I stopped a moment to watch a band of busy peasants at work bringing rich black mud from the lake-side to enrich their little patches of land. They were using every means of carrying the stuff—wheelbarrows, carts, sacks, baskets. Never shall I forget the flash of steel glinting in the eye of a stout built little woman of forty in a minimum of dark blue garments and in bare feet as she fairly skipped by with a swinging stride carrying two enormous baskets of wet earth balanced on a yoke. It would have been overmuch for many a man. I took off my hat to her.

The sports of such a people are likely to do with feats of strength, and hence the professional wrestler and the high amateur of judo or jiu-jitsu hold the lofty places in popular estimation. Fencing of the two-handed sword type has its votaries. All sorts of minor sports, running, imitation of cock fighting, archery, battledore—the latter among women—have a place in native sports. The great sport from abroad likely in the end to be the most popular of all is baseball. The Japanese is especially built for it in his speed and alertness. The Keio University team and the Waseda University team have set the pattern for the colleges and high schools, and soon every village will have its exemplar of the twirling sphere. Every afternoon teams of schoolboys may be seen playing in Hibiya Park Tokyo, with all the accompaniments of "Kill the umpire!" and "Slide, Hideyoshi, slide!" Lawn tennis is finding favor, but more slowly. There are many courts, but they are not so far turning out many apt devotees.

Professional wrestling, "sumo," is among the oldest sports of Japan. In former times the wrestlers were the pets of the rich provincial daimios—the feudal lords—and twice a year they were sent from all Japan at Yedo and gave great exhibitions. Nowadays they form a class by themselves, into which entrance can only be gained by aspirants who, first setting out as pupils of the great wrestlers, are given a chance to gain entrance into the lowest class and so to work up to the first rank in the course of six or seven years, if they are ever to "make it."

As the geishas are chosen from among the prettiest girls of the poorer classes, and work for years under close tutelage to learn the arts and graces of the calling, so the wrestlers are taken from the tallest and most robust of the working people, and have for years to undergo an apprenticeship with only one object, viz. the ability to exert tremendous muscular power for a few minutes at a time. The wrestlers run anywhere from 5 feet 7 to 6 feet and over, the present champion, Tachiyama, being two inches and a half above six feet. As long endurance is not called for they are careless of the accumulation of badly fat, indeed most desirous of it, as the added weight makes it harder to budge them, and the vast expanse of flesh is the harder to grip. They are enormous feeders and large meat eaters and sake consumers.

There are five grades, none of them drawing large salaries, but they generally manage to live decently by gifts from rich admirers. The men are pressed in two divisions, the east and west, once doubtless a matter of geographical origin of the athletes, wholly arbitrary. When a

JUDO CLASS AT PRACTICE

JAPANESE FENCING

TACHIYAMA AND OROCHIGATA WITH UMPIRE

In Contrast to Brute Strength of Wrestlers Is Adroit Skill of Votaries of Judo

ment. He had already thrown six on successive days and was greeted with a long storm of cheers when he appeared and began to stamp, stretch and spread. He was good enough to pose before the camera for me after the championship for 1914 was secured to him, and I must say he seemed easily the finest man of all I saw.

He stands very erect. His measurements are: Height, 6 feet 2.56 inches; round the chest, 51.20 inches; weight, 296 pounds. He was born in 1877, making him 37 years old.

His opponent on the afternoon I saw him was a smaller man, but muscular, wiry and wary. I thought of the bout I have described at Nagoya, and wondered what would happen. The preliminaries were prolonged, with this excuse that the audience could not see too much of Tachiyama's fine poses. At last there were "sets" with the aspect of an immediate clash coming. Sure enough, but it was over in two seconds. The shorter man crouched as if ready to sidestep when Tachiyama came for him, but there was no time.

With one terrific spring he had this way follow in his grasp and flung him outside the ring, following him himself, coming down upon him like a falling cliff over the bank and sliding down head foremost to the floor of the house. It looked as if the champion must have hurt himself, and that the breath, at least, had been crushed out of the under man, but both arose unharmed, and the audience rose and roared "Tachiyama" as the wrestler knelt and saluted.

Judo is altogether different, not only in action and purpose but in its votaries. We have heard much of it in the United States for the last dozen years, but you must see it at Prof. Kano's academy at Tokyo to witness it in its glory. The professor has been teaching it for thirty years. It was he who at that early day took the three styles of judo and made one comprehensive system of them all. Let it be said, first of all, that it is a system of defence or offence in wrestling by which skill takes advantage of an opponent's strength in attack to defeat him.

It rests primarily, according to Prof. Kano, on the simple proposition that when equilibrium is destroyed a man falls or may be thrown easily. This was the Samurai system, used by those tough and polished soldiers of the old regime. One of their feats was to throw a man in armor in such a way as to break his neck. Then there was the duo of the criminal classes that aimed at choking or breaking the limbs, even taking the life of a victim. Last of these was the police judo aimed at subduing an opponent by choking or otherwise for the purpose of making arrests, yet stopping short of homicide. Prof. Kano's system must be seen in action to be appreciated.

Visiting his academy one afternoon we saw fifty to sixty couples of youths, from 17 to 25, engaged in practice. They wear short white drawers and thick linen jackets, buttonless in front and showing the bare breasts.

It was an inspiring sight. Each couple fought, according to the rules, with a vigor and dash that left nothing to be desired. Not a word was said. The floor was thickly matted. The men were barefoot. Each grasped his opponent's coat lapel. They pulled, tripped, recovered, strained and presently down went one with a crash. Up again and at it again. Crash, crash, down they were going all over the place. It was a continual slap, bang, fall and rise. Sometimes one on the floor struggled with another on top of him with a strange hold. They writhed, puffed, sweated, but it went on until one was so overcome that he tapped the floor with hand or foot, or else he was utterly fatigued and blown. When the struggles reached their limit the men simply rose, bowed to each other, smiled and stood aside for a few minutes' rest. Loss of temper, even if slight exhibition of it, is against a man's rules.

There are nine grades, and it takes about three years hard work to reach the third grade. Few get much higher, and there are some who never attain even the first grade. In the winter the academy opened long before dawn, and the men came in crowds to practice and harden themselves working in the cold.

Later on I attended an exhibition contest in the same hall and witnessed 200 couples take falls from each other in rapid succession. The bouts lasted four minutes at the most. At the end of three minutes a bell was rung in warning, so that they finished up or made a draw. There were natural some fine exhibitions, and the fortunes of the two sides fluctuated all the afternoon.

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JAPANESE WRESTLERS



PROFESSOR JIGORO KANO

festival is declared the men are called to face each other from these two divisions. When one of the wrestlers in either camp has defeated all the ten brought against him in a tournament at Tokyo, including members of the highest class, called *ozeki*, he is in the championship class and may be elected by the high committee of wrestlers. Hinochita Katsun—supreme champion—and entitled to wear the yokozuna or hempo belt—a relic of the very old days of the sport.

They wear their hair long and carry it braided in a fancy knot on the tops of their heads, giving them a red Indian look, very gay and debonair. In the ring their feet are bare and they wear only a loin cloth. Although among the higher men you will meet many monstrosities of adipose tissue the large majority are tall, long limbed and beautifully made and muscled.

It was at Nagoya that I first saw them wrestle, and although they were not of the highest class it was in a way more interesting than the wrestling at the great wrestling festival at Tokyo, where I saw the enormous men of the champion class at handgrips. For instance, the bouts between the contestants, all fine, sinewy young men, were best two out of three, which exhibited a wrestler's best points, as falls were never decided in succession along the same line of grips or throws.

The ring is a circle of soft earth about fifteen feet in diameter raised about three feet above the floor of the hall, with a line drawn clear around its edge. The wrestler can push, pull or lift his opponent so that any part of his body crosses the line it is his bout. Equally if he throws him or bears so upon him that even one finger touches the ground he wins. It is hot work while it lasts, but it is only a few seconds, and the higher the grade of wrestler the shorter the time of actual struggle. The preliminaries take time, however.

While at Nagoya we saw twenty couples wrestle their three falls in ninety minutes, or less than five min-

utes each. At Tokyo, with the great ones, only one fall is given each man, and the general proportion was six minutes of preliminaries to six seconds or less of action. The hall at Nagoya was a new iron structure, modelled on that at Tokyo, only smaller, so one description will answer for both. It is amphitheatrical and there are no chairs. The audience squats in squared off spaces on cushions. Our party, however, was politely given chairs.

The ring is in the centre with four corner poles and a roof, the latter evidently a relic of the time the contests were in the open air and sun and rain were to be guarded against. The ritual is curious.

The next two or three contestants sit on benches east and west of the ring. There is an umpire in a long ermine-trimmed gown who carries a closed fan with a long tassel, and an announcer, who calls the names of the pair, as "Golden Hills from the East and Red Mountain from the West" (the wrestlers all use stage names expressive of strength).

Clad only in black or purple loin cloth they rise as their names were called and mount the platform, kneeling opposite each other and making a ceremonial bow, with their knuckles on the floor. Then they arose and went through a line ring up process. With an outward circular swing of the right leg they brought the foot down with a stamp and followed suit with the left. Then, with both legs well apart, they lowered their bodies until the calves touched the thighs, the heels off the ground. Then they rose with a spring, walked to a corner post, took a pinch of salt from a bag and scattered it for luck. In an instant they were

the moment the "set" looks like business the umpire sets up a sort of chirruping. Finally, both wrestlers arise together, giving a single shout, and fly at each other. It should be understood that you may grip your opponent's loin cloth and may push, pull, lift or trip or use any of the wrestler's forty-eight tricks, but you must use an open hand, and may not strike, butt or kick.

Their attacks were as various as their physique. Some flew at their opponents and got to handgrips immediately, others beat the air, much as a struggling cat would, shifting their ground and circling the ring. A first attempt to push out the other never succeeded. To avoid that seemed the A B C of the game. In all bouts they were soon interlocked, their hands clasping the foe's slippery body or clutching for the loin cloth at the side or back of it. They kept their legs wide apart to give a stronger base, and strain with the arms and upper part of the body seeking to throw the other off his balance, or by a sudden shift to throw him over his hips. There is no question about the strenuousness and the skill. Sometimes a man, apparently about to be thrown, by reaching down the other's back during a hot struggle trips the loin cloth, and holds solid. Sometimes both fall apparently together, but some one detects a difference. There is an appeal. It is a long business, but generally a "draw" is declared after consultations in which each side votes solid for its own man.

There was one amusing bout. A powerful fat man, fat all over, but obviously very strong, towered above his foe and stamped and spread and swayed in great shape. "Lefty Summit of the West" was his name. His meagre, bright eyed

opponent was "Little Whirlpool of the East." After the usual preliminaries the fat man advanced confidently on the little one, reaching over to take him by the shoulders. Quick as a flash Little Whirlpool ducked, clasped the mountainous fellow about the hips, lifted him bodily from the ground and planted him on his feet outside the ring. The audience roared.

The giant seemed to enjoy it, too, it was so surprising. In the next two rounds the little man went to the earth in double quick order, and as Little Whirlpool turned to go down, Lefty Summit, smiling, tapped him on the shoulder as saying: "How dare you, you little shrimp!" then walked contentedly to his side of the ring, squatted on his heels and saluted the house, while the umpire pointed his fan at him, and cried "Lefty Summit of the West." The little man had, as is customary, shot down a diagonal passage out of the theatre, while the victor waited to serve the next man on his side with water, if he needed a drink.

At Tokyo the hall is very large and holds an audience of 13,000 people. For the better places you must hire your seats well in advance. So much hangs upon the single bout which an athlete engages, all powerful men. "Mount Shaka," a superb 5 feet 10 man, disposed of "Great Cascade" of 6 feet 2 inches, after a lightning grapple of four seconds. "Silken River" of the East faced "Sandstone" of the West—two splendidly matched specimens of his men. "Sandstone" won with a mighty effort in six seconds.

The appearance of last year's champion, Tachiyama or "Sword Mountain," was reserved for the last bout of the day. To retain his championship he must defeat every man brought against him for the ten days of the tourna-